

Review Committee – 6 November 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the **Review Committee** held on **6 November 2018** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr J C Burton
Vice-Chairman: Cllr D J Sperring

Cllr Mrs J R Gooding
Cllr J D Griffin
Cllr B T Hazlewood
Cllr N J Hookway
Cllr M Hoy

Cllr M J Lucas-Gill
Cllr Mrs C A Pavelin
Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr P J Shaw
Cllr C M Stanley

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr S A Smith - Portfolio Holder, Finance

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Mrs C M Mason, J R F Mason and Mrs J E McPherson

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr A Eves for Cllr J R F Mason
Cllr Mrs D Hoy for Cllr Mrs C M Mason

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton - Managing Director
M Petley - Head of Finance
L Moss - Assistant Director, Community and Housing Services
V Conroy - Corporate Communications Officer
P Gowers - Overview and Scrutiny Officer
M Power - Democratic Services Officer

209 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Further to a statement at the 9 October meeting, it was noted that a list of officer telephone numbers had been distributed to all Members on 19 October 2018.

210 THE COUNCIL'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATIONS PROCESS

The Committee considered the report of the Managing Director, which provided an update on the Council's use of social media and the Council's communications process.

Members were updated with statistics relating to the Council's use of social media platforms:-

The Council has 2,166 Facebook followers, with a reach of 22,911 people; Facebook reach is the number of unique people who see the content. The higher reaching posts involve video, an indication that more can be done in this area. From 31 October to 6 November there had been 221 shares. Popular topics included the Hockley Woods playground, with a reach of 13,000. The best performing social media post had been the Council's WW1 'Tommy' silhouettes, which had been moved around the District in the run up to Armistice Day, resulting in a reach of 11,000.

A video that publicised the Council's Old House as a wedding venue had had a reach of over 4,000 within a week. It was likely that these figures could be increased with the use of Instagram.

The Council had 4,554 Twitter followers and had introduced a 'morning greeting', which had shown an increase in engagement. Twitter was being used more by residents to contact the Council with questions as an alternative to using the phone. The top tweet had been a video of Wallasea Island produced by the RSPB.

The Southend Airport remembrance event to be held later in the week would be Facebooked live.

The Council's 'Tell Me More' now had 9,205 subscribers, which was increasing, providing an efficient way of communicating with residents and businesses.

Staff were being trained to use the social media platform, Musterpoint, which would be introduced shortly. The Council had 128 followers on Instagram.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- The Council as a corporate body had to take a measured approach when dealing with third party posts and would not generally engage with individuals on social media. Where incorrect information was stated by individuals, the Council could issue a press release containing the correct information and direct people to where on the Council's website the correct information could be found.
- The Council was working on an internal Social Media Policy but there was no date set for its completion. A policy would not provide any more safeguards and procedures than already existed.
- The Communications Team could liaise with the Youth Council for advice on the platforms being used by younger people. Snapchat could be used to disseminate information that is targeted towards younger people.

- The Council's social media platforms were not monitored after hours, during the weekend or on Bank Holidays. The Communications team had made use of social media outside of office hours in the past for emergency messages and updates.
- Members requested that an update be provided to the Committee in 12 months' time to enable comparison of the statistics provided. Statistics could also be provided via the Members' Bulletin.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted and that an update be provided to the Committee in 12 months' time.

211 REMOVAL OF PAYMENT KIOSKS

The Committee considered the report of the Section 151 Officer, which provided details of the impact of the removal of the payment kiosk terminals from the Council's Rochford and Rayleigh receptions.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- The impact of the removal of the kiosks had been low; only nine official complaints had been received. The Council had contacted the individuals concerned and had found acceptable alternative methods of payment for seven of the nine. Cash payments had been accepted from the remaining two, due to exceptional mitigating circumstances.
- The option of adding a bar code to Council Tax bills to enable payment through PayPoint had been discounted due to the costs involved, namely an initial cost of £18,000 and an ongoing annual cost of £1,980. The use of other methods of payment, including PayPoint, could be considered at a future date, should there be a marked drop in Council Tax collection rates.
- Council Tax collection rates had not decreased since payment kiosks had been removed and the Council remained on target to achieve a 98.3% collection rate.
- Currently, the Council accepted cheques as a payment method. However, payment by cheque would be phased out in time; the Section 151 Officer could provide more detail. The 2019/20 Council Tax bill would list the payment options currently available.
- It had not been financially feasible to write separately to each resident in the District advising of the decision to remove the option of cash as a payment method. A flyer explaining the change was produced and communication was made with the individuals affected. The majority of

Council Tax payers in the District paid their Council Tax by direct debit.

- There is no charge for late payment of Council Tax, unless provided for under a statutory charging order; the collection of outstanding Council Tax is administered through the Council Tax Recovery Department.
- Whether the slight reduction in the number of residents paying their Council Tax by direct debit from 84.15% in July to 84.04% in September represented an ongoing trend would be monitored.
- Residents could contact Council with any issues or questions they had about methods of payment.

Resolved

That the contents of the report be noted.

212 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 (RIPA)

The Committee considered the report of the Assistant Director, Community and Housing Services, which provided an update on the use of RIPA over the past year and allowed for the review of the Council's RIPA policy.

In response to questions, the following was noted:-

- More recent ways of recording information, for example, using a 'dash cam' in a car, do not fall within the ambit of RIPA.
- Any CCTV used by the Council would not fall within the scope of RIPA as long as there is appropriate signage. The Council has no CCTV systems under its control that it actively monitors.
- Training for Members and officers, which provided an overview of the RIPA powers and social media, was delivered by an external specialist trainer in March and July 2018.
- The Council would not undertake surveillance on behalf of another authority.

Resolved

That the Council's annual use of RIPA be noted.

Recommended to Full Council:-

- (1) That the amendments to the Council's RIPA policy set out in section 4 of the officer report be approved.
- (2) That the new policy relating to the use of social media in relation to investigations, attached as Appendix 2 to the officer report, be approved.

213 KEY DECISIONS DOCUMENT

The Committee considered the Key Decisions Document and noted its contents.

13/18 Garden Communities Prospectus. This had been removed from the Key Decisions Document because it had been agreed that it was too early in the process for local authorities to engage on this Government initiative. Rochford might engage at a later date.

It was requested that in future Members be advised of the reason if a Key Decision was removed from the Document.

3/18 A127 Air Quality Project – Outline/Final Business Case. The decision would be made in December 2018.

214 WORK PLAN

The Committee considered its Work Plan.

The meeting closed at 8.40 pm.

Chairman

Date

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